Managing the Emotional Impact of Living with a Food Allergy

Understanding It
Preparing For It
Reducing It

Jeanne Herzog, PhD
Why is this so stressful?

Humans are motivated to satisfy some basic needs in life (Maslow).

- Food
- Safety
- Belonging

When these three basic needs intersect rather than coincide, we are in conflict.
Conflict ➔ Stress ➔ Anxiety
A-N-X-I-E-T-Y

- It’s not a four letter word.
- A little bit of it is good for everyone.
  - Keeps us on our toes.
  - Tells us to question.
  - Protects and motivates.
  - Particularly for those with food allergies. It promotes diligence and adherence to safety measures.
But . . .

- Too much anxiety can weigh us down.
- *Especially in situations of uncertainty, lack of control and with the burden of responsibility for safety*
What does anxiety look like when it’s “too much?”

**Physical**
- crying, shaking, unexplained illness, pain, fatigue, ailments, actual allergy symptoms without exposure

**Behavioral**
- irritability, argumentative, withdrawal, avoiding, running away, restricting safe foods, checking, acting out, risk taking

**Cognitive**
- what if?, hypervigilance, rumination, lack of concentration, lack of attention, academic changes

**Social**
- withdrawal from others, fighting with others, seeking attention from others in unhealthy ways
Your Child
Through the Lifespan

As your child ages, the risks, stress and anxiety of living with a food allergy may change. And so might your level of anxiety, as a parent.

- Ages 1-6 Dependent Age
- Ages 7-12 Emerging Awareness
- Ages 13-18 Seeking Independence
- Ages 18+ Tackling Adulthood
Some Examples

Ages 1-6 Dependent Age
- **Emotional:** mirror parent’s
- **Cognitive:** concrete thinkers
- **Social:** world is mostly the immediate family

Ages 7-12 Emerging Awareness
- **Emotional:** discovering their own
- **Cognitive:** abstract thinkers (can hypothesize)
- **Social:** school and friends are added
Some Examples

Ages 13-18 Seeking Independence
- *Emotional:* expressing with maturity
- *Cognitive:* abstract and independent
- *Social:* widening and includes dating

Ages 18+ Tackling Adulthood
- *Emotional:* managing emotions with maturity
- *Cognitive:* focusing on the future
- *Social:* wider world without parents
Look for differences in these developmental domains

- Emotional
- Cognitive
- Social
Safe from the Impact
Good news! You can develop a safety plan for staying *emotionally healthy*.

*First and foremost:*

**A Safety Plan for Parents**

- Accept the challenge bravely.
- Knowledge is power.
- Take care of yourself.
- Teach and empower your child with knowledge.
- Seek support when necessary.
- Create a safety plan that changes as your child grows.
- Create balance in your life.
Then . . .

A Safety Plan for Your Child/Teen

- Accept the challenge bravely.
- Learn and follow your Emergency Care Plan.
- Tell others about what your food allergy means to you.
- Be aware of your feelings so they protect you, not hinder you.
- Calm your thoughts. Think more positively.
- Calm your body with strategies.
- Learn all you can about yourself. Your allergy is only one thing about you.
A Safety Plan for Adults with Food Allergies

- Accept the challenge bravely.
- Knowledge is power.
- Create YOUR *normal lifestyle*
- Take care of yourself.
- Spread out your energy.
- Find your people.
- Calm your mind and body.
- Seek support when necessary.
A Safety Plan for Everyone

Calm Your Body

- Notice how anxiety and worry feel in your body.
- Calm your body using gentle touch, relaxation exercises and belly breathing.
- Drink a sip of cool water or get fresh air.
- Listen to soothing music.
- Get your body moving.
- Play, play, play!
- Pet your cat or dog.
- Get a good night’s sleep.
- Ask for a hug from someone you trust.
A Safety Plan for Everyone

Calm Your Thoughts

- Create optimism in your thinking.
- Change your perspective. Notice when you are safe.
- Focus on what you can do, instead of what you can’t.
- Get to know your courageous side.
- Remind yourself of the control, choices and consistency in your life.
- Think about the successful precautions you’ve been taking.
- Know the evidence that supports the low risk of certain situations.
- Remind yourself that we are working on educating others.
- Ask advice from others who understand and care.
- Go over the facts your medical doctor gave you about safe situations.
- Remind yourself of the skills you use to live with a food allergy.
Re-cap and Other Ideas

- Encourage journaling about successes.
- Create an incentive plan for trying new safe foods.
- Create a simple safe checklist to use before choosing a food.
- Make relaxation a family activity.
- Find and use an anxiety workbook or other program.
- Create an allergy-friendly support team.
Should we seek professional help?
“Children want the same things we want. To laugh, to be challenged, to be entertained, and delighted.”

~ Dr. Seuss
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Jeanne Herzog, PhD
www.summitpsychologyclinic.com
drherzog@summitpsychologyclinic.com
Questions?
Our Next Webinar

Emergency Treatment of Anaphylaxis
Trends in Care and Plans for Improvement

Jennifer Jobrack
Wednesday, July 15
1:00 – 2:00 PM ET

Member registration opens
Friday, June 26

General registration opens
Monday, June 29